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SUBJECT: PART 2 OF 2: BAGHDAD'S SUNNIS REQUIRE LOCALLY
TAILORED SUPPORT TO FIGHT AL QAEDA

REF: BAGHDAD 1866

Classified By: POLCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: This cable is the second in a two-part series examining the broader significance for Baghdad of local uprisings against Sunni and Shia extremists currently taking place in the Ameriya and Ghazaliya neighborhoods. Extremists in both neighborhoods appear to have suffered from physical barriers that limit their mobility, and from the increased presence of Coalition Forces in their areas of operation. Despite these common elements, the contrasting situations in Ameriya and Ghazaliya illustrate key political and demographic variables involved in working with local Sunni Arab groups; the importance of empowering Coalition Forces and EPRTs to evaluate each Baghdad neighborhood individually; and the challenge of devising a citywide policy for identifying and empowering local Sunni leaders. END SUMMARY.

A COMMON THEME: PHYSICAL CONFINEMENT AND COALITION OUTPOSTS
DIMINISH LOCAL SUPPORT FOR EXTREMISTS

¶2. (S) The physical confinement of AQI to enclosed areas in Ameriya and Ghazaliya has reportedly led them to victimize the population they claimed to protect. The EPRT reports that 2BCT has established, since January, 13 Joint Security Stations (JSS's) and Combat Outposts (COPs) throughout Mansour and Kadhamiyah Districts, which together contain an estimated one million people. These locally-situated forces have helped to prevent Shia and Sunni militias, as well as AQI, from entering or leaving selected Sunni neighborhoods, and concrete T-walls have helped to diminish freedom of movement into and out of the controlled areas by both Shia and Sunni/AQI extremists. 2BCT has completely banned vehicular traffic in some parts of Ameriya, a ban enforced by cooperating Iraqi Army forces.

¶3. (S) Their local emplacement has also helped the battalions (1-5 CAV and 2-12 CAV) to identify local leaders and trends, and provided a local address for residents who seek help from Coalition Forces. When this approach made it more difficult for extremist groups to invade each other's territory, AQI lost some justification for their self-proclaimed role as "protectors." They also lost revenue, part of which they previously derived from crimes committed outside their immediate neighborhoods. As a result, local targets became more attractive, which in turn precipitated conflict with the non-militia citizens and internal divisions within the militia/AQI groups. This dynamic developed in Ameriya among Sunni militants, and the EPRT reports that limiting the movement southward of JAM groups in Ghazaliya's northern neighbor, Shula, also precipitated internal squabbling among Shia militants operating there.

¶4. (S) While successful in diminishing the power of AQI, prolonged physical confinement in Sunni areas is not economically sustainable. Following the recent loss of a gas station in Ameriya, and the difficulty of transporting goods and services into the neighborhood, locals have begun to ask 1-5 CAV and the EPRT for greater freedom of movement. Notably, during their drive through some of Ameriya's main streets, polooffs witnessed very few open businesses.

MANY VARIABLES: LEADERS, DEMOGRAPHY, NEIGHBORING AREAS

¶5. (S) The comparative situations in Ameriya and Ghazaliya also illustrate key political and demographic variables involved in working with local Sunni Arab groups that seek assistance in challenging extremists. Baghdad's population density and sheer geographic scale permit a rapid movement of people and militias, which in turn create numerous, fluid fault lines. When Coalition Forces (CF) successfully limit militants' mobility, through concrete structures and locally-situated Coalition and Iraqi forces, they must then contend with the particular social dynamics of the neighborhood whose residents they have to some extent immobilized.

¶6. (S) Newly contained Sunni populations may react to physical barriers and increased troop presence in any number of ways. Even if CF pressure successfully leads extremist groups to alienate local residents, this development does not necessarily ensure that alienated locals will attack the extremists. Local Sunnis often lack the leadership and means to fight. Ghazaliya, for instance, lacks the strong, unifying leadership that helped Ameriya to take AQI by

BAGHDAD 00002448 002 OF 002

surprise. Even when local groups do choose to fight extremists, many Sunni areas face a greater threat from Shia militias than they do from Sunni terrorists; local leaders may thus choose to attack Shia militias, as in Ghazaliya, which could perpetuate rather than diminish sectarian strife. Other residents in newly confined areas may choose not to fight at all, or may simply flee the area rather than live in close quarters with militias or terrorists of their own sect.

¶7. (S) Moreover, the violent altercation between Abu Abid and his deputy, and the injury to Sheikh Khaled's wife, reflect the fragility of Baghdad's Sunni groups at present. The EPRT reports that, without these two leaders, the fight against AQI in Ameriya would grind to a sudden halt. No one else in the neighborhood matches the political leadership and stature of Khaled, and Abu Abid's skills as a field commander earn high praise from the EPRT, 2BCT, and 1-5 CAV. More than any other factor, Ameriya's fight against AQI depends on the safety and commitment of two individuals -- as well as the ability of US commanders and soldiers to work with these leaders and their followers. (NOTE: While the fight in Ameriya itself largely depends on the leadership of these two men, events in Ameriya connect to a much larger uprising against AQI taking place in other parts of Baghdad, Abu Ghraib and Anbar province. In many instances, tribal leaders from outside Baghdad monitor and support the fight against Sunni extremists inside Baghdad. END NOTE.)

¶8. (S) Ameriya thus highlights the vulnerability of a Sunni fight against terrorists in their midst that currently depends on personalities instead of institutions, such as the police or security forces. Taken together, Ameriya and Ghazaliya underscore the importance of empowering Coalition Forces and EPRTs to evaluate each local neighborhood on its merits, and the challenge of devising a citywide policy for identifying and empowering local Sunni leaders who seek to fight extremists.

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